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ABSTRACT

Reflecting the popularity of television viewing, the use of captioned video cassettes bridges the gap between "televiewing" and reading, and can be used to improve the reading skills of college students, who see these materials as helpful in improving concentration, mental imagery, speed, and comprehension. Cassettes, either of captioned foreign films or closed captioned (CC) television shows, are easy to obtain and use, relatively inexpensive, and lend themselves easily to a variety of types of lessons. Writing activities, including summaries, critical reviews, and story maps, may also be developed around video presentations. The instructor must exercise certain cautions in the use of captioned videos, since extensive use of this medium could result in a lack of flexibility in the students' approach to reading tasks. Readability is another area of concern, since the fixed rate of presentation may make some videos difficult for slow readers. However, by previewing all videos to check technical quality and content, these problems can be avoided. (MM)

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CAPTIONED VIDEO CASSETTES:

A Source of Reading Material

Paper presented at the International Reading Association (32nd, Anaheim, CA, May 4, 1987)

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Surveys (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1987) prove the obvious. We are a nation of televiewers. Ninety-eight percent of the homes in the U.S. have television sets and they are turned on for over seven hours per day. Those of us in the business of promoting reading may have a way of bridging a gap between the popular activity, televiewing, and the sometimes not so popular activity, reading, through the use of captioned video cassettes.

Studies have shown that reading instruction based on written material related to popular television shows has been motivating and instructionally effective (Hamilton, 1976; Solomon, 1976; Szabo & Lamiell-Landy, 1981.) Another report (Koskinen et al., 1985) found closed captioned (CC) television to be popular and suitable reading material when used with elementary level remedial reading students and students who spoke English as a second language.

In college courses titled Corrective Reading, Reading Improvement, and Speed Reading, this writer and several of his colleagues have used both captioned foreign films on video cassette and cassettes of popular (CC) television shows to improve the reading skills of college students.

Why use captioned videos?

Perhaps our most compelling reason for using captioned video cassettes with college students is that they are popular. Student journals and course evaluations often attest to their enjoyment and educational value. Students see these materials as being helpful in improving concentration, mental imagery, speed and comprehension.

In reading lab, when students are given a choice of activities, watching a captioned video cassette is always the most popular decision. Many of the foreign films we use have won awards and provide the opportunity for our students to enjoy good literature. Cassettes are easy to obtain and use and are relatively inexpensive when compared to films or the prospect of purchasing books for everyone.

Suggestions for lessons:

An infinite variety of directed reading activities is possible with captioned videos. Figure 1 is a reading lesson based on a Sherlock Holmes adventure which was presented on the Public Broadcasting System as part of the Mystery series. This lesson illustrates how different types of thinking may be stimulated and how vocabulary may be developed through the use of this medium. This particular lesson may be done orally with the class, or students may write their responses. The types of lessons that may be used are only limited by the imagination of the instructor. Once a lesson has been developed it may be used semester after semester with different groups of students.

(Figure One Here)

The Directed Reading Thinking activity (Stauffer, 1969), where the tape is stopped periodically and students are asked to make predictions and defend previous predictions, lends itself nicely to video cassette presentations. Feature length films may be shown in segments, with each hiatus providing the opportunity for review and prediction.

Writing activities are easily developed around video presentations. Summaries, critical reviews, and story maps have all been used successfully in our classes.

Of course, captioned videos may be shown simply for pleasure reading. Apparently many benefits, such as those mentioned in the previous section, naturally come from their use.

Cautions in the use of captioned videos.

While captioned videos can be a useful part of the college reading class certain cautions should be exercised in their use. First, mature readers control their reading rate and the manner in which they process print. When viewing captioned material the reader must relinquish much of this control to the VCR. This raises the possibility that extensive use of this medium could result in a lack of flexibility in the student's approach to reading tasks. For this reason the reading class should be involved in a great variety of reading activities other than those involving videos.

A second area of concern is readability. While the readability level of most captioned materials tends to be low, due to short sentence dialogue and common vocabulary, the fixed rate of presentation may make some captioned videos difficult for struggling and slow readers. Another factor affecting readability is the legibility of captions. Not all captioning is well done and captions are not always clear. In selecting captioned materials the instructor should preview all videos and select those that are of good technical quality and content.

Obtaining captioned videos

The Video Source Book is an excellent reference for those who seek captioned video cassettes. It provides entries for virtually every video cassette available. Entries are updated yearly. Each entry has a notation if a cassette has captions. An extensive list of suppliers is also provided. This reference book is likely to be found in school libraries and media centers.

CC television programs may be taped off the air with a VCR just as you would tape any other program. The rules and laws that apply to copying and using CC programs are the same as those that apply to any off-air taping. These have been summarized in the article "Off-air recordings of television programs: Copyright law guidelines," which appeared in the April 1982 issue of the Reading Teacher. To make the captions appear when viewing a tape it is necessary to have a caption decoder. These may be purchased from the National Captioning Institute (Falls Church Va.), Sears, Circuit City, and other distributors for about $200. There is an almost unlimited variety of television programs that are closed captioned.

In conclusion, we have found that captioned video cassettes can make a valuable contribution to the college reading class. They are enjoyable and educational. They lend themselves easily to a variety of types of lessons, and they are easy to obtain and use. Their cost is not prohibitive, when one considers that they may be used many times.

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FIGURE I

DIRECTED READING ACTIVITY

Sherlock Holmes: The Greek Interpreter

Pre-reading Questions

What do you know about Sherlock Holmes?
Where is London? Greece? Be as specific as possible.
In what period of history do Sherlock Holmes adventures take place?
What weather conditions do you expect in London?

Vocabulary

Determine the meaning of each word. Then use each word in a sentence so that it relates to someone or something in your life.

reticent	phenomenon	misanthropy	chronicler
perplexity	indignant	obstinacy	perceive

(Stop after 25 min. After: "May God have mercy on your soul.")

Before reading second half

Any better responses to pre-reading questions?
In what scene or scenes did the Holmes brothers demonstrate their powers of observation and deduction?
How will Holmes find out where the man is being held captive?
What deductions can be made about who the captive and the woman Sophia are and why they are being held?

Vocabulary

Same direction as for previous vocabulary.

legation	particulars	magistrate	remorse
trustee	warrant	intervals	coupe de gras

(Show the second half of the video.)

After the story

How was each of the vocabulary words used in the story?
How did the Holmes brothers' powers of observation and deduction play a role in solving the case?
Critically review this episode. You should consider both the content of the story and the quality of the presentation in your review.